

Message Text

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SUBJECT: OLIGARCH STATES NEW TREATY WILL PROMOTE
POLITICAL STABILITY

SUMMARY. ESTRELLA DIRECTOR AND PROMINENT PANAMANIAN OLIGARCH, TOMAS
ALTAMIRANO DUQUE, TOLD

EMBASSY OFFICERS FEB 3 THAT HE BELIEVED A
NEW TREATY WAS ESSENTIAL FOR PANAMA'S FUTURE POLITICAL STABILITY. FOR
THIS REASON HE WOULD SUPPORT THE TREATY BEING NEGOTIATED BY THE
TORRIJOS REGIME DESPITE FACT HE WAS NOT ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT TORRIJOS.
HE SAID HE WAS CONCERNED OVER RECENT CRITICISM OF GOP'S HANDLING OF
NEGOTIATIONS AND HAD DIRECTED LA ESTRELLA'S STAFF TO PREPARE EDITORIAL

DESIGNED TO REFUTE GOP'S CRITICS (SEE USINFO DATED FEB 4). ALTAMI-
RANO DUQUE'S VIEWS ARE SHARED BY SOME OTHER OLIGARCHS WHO CAN ALSO BE
EXPECTED TO HELP GARNER SUPPORT FOR A TREATY. BECAUSE ALTAMIRANO
DUQUE IS ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL AND INFLUENTIAL OF OLIGARCHS
AND CONTROLS MAJOR PANAMANIAN NEWSPAPER, HIS SUPPORT FOR NEW TREATY
WILL BE EXTREMELY HELPFUL TO TORRIJOS. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING DINNER AT AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY
ROGERS FEB 3, TOMAS ALTAMIRANO DUQUE, THE DIRECTOR OF LA ESTRELLA,
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TOLD U.S. OFFICIALS THAT HE THOUGHT TORRIJOS' GOVERNMENT WAS

THE ONLY PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT WHICH COULD MUSTER SUFFICIENT CONTROL TO SUCCESSFULLY NEGOTIATE AND CONCLUDE A NEW CANAL TREATY. HE EXPRESSED VIEW THAT A FULLY DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATIVE TYPE OF GOVERNMENT COULD NOT WITHSTAND THE PRESSURES GENERATED BY THE CANAL ISSUE. THIS, HE SAID, WAS WHY PRESIDENT ROBLES HAD NOT DARED TO SEEK RATIFICATION OF THE 1967 TREATIES. HE ALSO SAID THAT RESPONSIBLE PANAMANIAN KNEW THAT ANY NEW TREATY WOULD HAVE TO PROVIDE FOR THE CONTINUANCE OF U.S. MILITARY BASES.

2. TORRIJOS, ACCORDING TO ALTAMIRANO DUQUE, WOULD BE ABLE TO GET A MAJORITY VOTE IN FAVOR OF A NEW TREATY WHICH REFLECTED THE 8 PRINCIPLES OF THE KISSINGER-TACK AGREEMENT, I.E. THAT GAVE PANAMA JURISDICTION AND SUBSTANTIALLY INCREASED ECONOMIC BENEFITS. A NEW TREATY WAS NECESSARY FOR THE FUTURE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STABILITY OF PANAMA. HE INDICATED THAT HE WOULD SUPPORT ANY TREATY THAT THE GOP WOULD ACCEPT.

3. ALTAMIRANO DUQUE SAID HE WAS CONCERNED, HOWEVER, OVER THE RECENT SURGE OF CRITICISM OF THE GOP'S NEGOTIATING EFFORTS AND THAT TO HELP DAMPEN THE CRITICISM HE HAD ORDERED THAT LA ESTRELLA PUBLISH AN EDITORIAL COMMENTARY IN FAVOR OF THE NEGOTIATIONS. THE COMMENTARY WHICH APPEARED ON ESTRELLA'S FRONT PAGE FEB 4 IN THE LA ESTRELLA OPINA COLUMN REMINDED ITS READERS THAT THE NEGOTIATING EFFORTS OF PREVIOUS GOVERNMENTS HAD ALWAYS BEEN ATTACKED BY THEIR OPPOSITION. THE REASON WAS THAT THE "OUTS" FEARED THAT THE "INS" WOULD EARN THE GRATITUDE OF THE PANAMANIAN PEOPLE FOR HAVING GOTTEN RID OF THE 1903 TREATY. THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT, ACCORDING TO THE EDITORIAL, HAD "EXPERT AND PATRIOTIC MEN" WHO WERE NEGOTIATING FOR THE RETURN OF "FULL SOVEREIGNTY" AND THE BENEFITS THAT GO WITH SOVEREIGNTY. THOSE PERSONS WHO, WITHOUT KNOWING THE TERMS OF THE NEW TREATY, AND WHO WERE ALREADY TRYING TO CREATE OPPOSITION TO IT, WERE NOT BEING FAIR OR PATRIOTIC AND ONE MIGHT QUESTION THEIR MOTIVES.

4. COMMENT. ALTHOUGH ALTAMIRANO DUQUE IS ADMITTEDLY NOT ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT TORRIJOS' GOVERNMENT, HE DOES COLLABORATE WITH IT AS A MATTER OF PRACTICAL POLITICS. HIS VIEWS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF A NEW CANAL TREATY FOR PANAMA'S FUTURE POLITICAL STABILITY ARE SHARED BY SOME OF HIS FELLOW OLIGARCHS SUCH AS THE ELETAS. BECAUSE HE IS THE PRINCIPAL SPOKESMAN FOR ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL AND WEALTHY

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FAMILY GROUPS OF PANAMA'S OLD OLIGARCHY, AND BECAUSE HE CONTROLS THE NEWSPAPER WHICH IS READ BY THE OLIGARCHY, HIS ASSISTANCE IN BUILDING PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR A TREATY WILL BE EXTREMELY VALUABLE TO TORRIJOS. THE EDITORIAL COMMENTARY REFERRED TO ABOVE SHOULD BE HELPFUL IN COUNTERING THE ANTI-TREATY EFFORTS OF THE GOP'S OPPOSITION. ITS NON-POLEMICAL AND COMMON-SENSE APPROACH IS A PLEASANT CONTRAST TO THE BOMBASTIC CHARGES AND COUNTERCHARGES WHICH HAVE BEEN BURLED ABOUT RECENTLY IN THE MEDIA.

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